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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 000472

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL, AND INR/AA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2019

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL SOCI NI

SUBJECT: SOLUDO'S ANAMBRA BRAVADO CONTINUES

REF: A. LAGOS 450

¶B. LAGOS 449 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: CG Donna M. Blair; Reasons Sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) A Federal Appeals Court ruled December 1 that People's Democratic Party (PDP) gubernatorial candidate Charles Soludo should suspend his campaign in Anambra State and "stop parading" himself as a candidate pending a final judicial outcome. The court also ordered the Independent Nigerian Election Commission (INEC) to stop dealing with Soludo as a candidate. Soludo had officially launched his campaign on December 3. Despite the PDP's disarray, we should not count out the resource-rich PDP from emerging as a serious contender. END SUMMARY.

BAD PDP BLOOD BOILS

¶2. (C) The inner struggle for the soul of Anambra State's PDP continues. Valentine Ozigbo and Victor Nwankwo -- two of over 50 gubernatorial aspirants -- took the PDP leadership to court following the party's selection of former Central Bank of Nigeria Governor Charles Soludo as its standard bearer. The plaintiffs asked the court to nullify Soludo's ticket on the grounds that his selection violated the party's constitution. An Abuja High Court, which had earlier restrained Soludo from portraying himself as a candidate, reinstated him on November 16 and ruled that it lacked the jurisdiction to address the grievance.

¶3. (C) Afam Ilunoh, the former Anambra State PDP Publicity Secretary and leader of the anti-Soludo faction, told ConGen Lagos Pol Specialist that his group will pursue the matter until justice is served and Soludo is removed as the PDP candidate. Ilunoh claimed a majority of the PDP members and supporters in Anambra State vowed to reject Soludo during the February 6 election should the court fail to remove him. He also pointed to the disconnect between PDP national leadership in Abuja and the party's rank and file in Anambra State, and predicted the PDP would lose in February if the matter were not resolved before mid-January.

SOLUDO MOVES FORWARD

¶4. (C) Soludo formally launched his Anambra gubernatorial campaign on December 3 despite the Federal Appeals court

order. Prominent PDP leaders, including party Chairman Vincent Ogbulafor, attended the big launch rally. The PDP intends to appeal to the Supreme Court to "save Soludo." The Court of Appeal, after issuing its December 1 order, adjourned the suit to December 14. If this order remains unchallenged, the PDP will not be able to present any candidate for the election as the deadline for the substitution of candidates is December 8.

COMMENT

¶15. (C) The messy machinations within the national and Anambra State PDP structures, along with the continuing involvement of the courts, have badly damaged the PDP's chances of winning the February 6 election. However, based on ConGen Lagos visits to Awka and Onitsha (ref A), it is still too early to count out the cash-rich, politically powerful PDP from finding a way to get back into the fray. END COMMENT.

¶16. (U) ConGen Lagos coordinated this telegram with Embassy Abuja.
BLAIR